

The 20-year War in Afghanistan: What Has America Achieved or Failed?

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Abstract

The main purpose of the research is to analyze the current realities in Afghanistan, when the Taliban re-established control over the country, and, furthermore, to present the comparative analysis of the strategy of different Presidents of America within the period from 2001 till 2021.

A significant part of the research is dedicated to the main reasons for the entrance of US Armed forces in Afghanistan after the 9/11 events, different aspects of the US forces deployment, and reasons for withdrawal.

Keywords: USA, Afghanistan, Taliban, geopolitics, U.S. Presidents

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Introduction

Responsibility for the events in Afghanistan is shared by four presidents, though only Joe Biden will be a symbol of the end and, to be honest, of a not-so-promising end.

The Taliban victory poses new security challenges to Afghanistan and for some undermines America's image as a reliable partner. During Biden's presidential campaign, you often heard the words "America Is Back", which was primarily associated with strengthening its position in the international arena and maximizing security in the system, but now there is a feeling that America has not returned but started descent as an influential actor.

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The capture of the capital caused confusion and panic. Past Taliban rule has forced thousands of Afghans to flee the country. Several photo videos depicting the evacuation of the desperate population have been released - the process of "peaceful transfer of power" has begun in the country. At least, so says the Taliban, but the facts show the opposite.

On the evening of August 15, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani issued a statement saying that the first person facing a difficult decision preferred to leave the country.

"Today I am faced with a difficult choice: I have to face the armed Taliban who wants to take over the palace if I leave a precious country to which I have dedicated twenty years. If I did not stop, many patriots would suffer, Kabul would be destroyed, leading to a humanitarian catastrophe "I have made it clear that they are ready to attack the whole of Kabul and its inhabitants to persecute me. I thought it would be better

to leave here to avoid bloodshed," he said (News, 2021).

It is true that at first, the Taliban said they did not want to take the city by force and bloodshed, but later they entered several settlements - the sound of gunfire was heard, they were wounded. According to the Taliban, this was done because the police and the government had left the city and it was necessary to "ensure order".

Journalists say members of the Taliban regime are taking to the streets looking for specific people to be killed.

The United States and Britain have deployed additional forces in Kabul to bring their people back home peacefully and safely.

In addition, the United States maintained a presence at Kabul International Airport during August to expedite the evacuation of thousands of civilians.

Unlike the Afghan president, Vice President Amrullah Saleh has declared himself acting president following the Afghan constitution and has established himself in one of the regions of Afghanistan, much of which was taken over by the Taliban in September.

He says he does not recognize the Taliban's victory and "will never live under one roof" with Islamist fundamentalists.

"I will never betray the legacy of my hero, Ahmad Masood (a general who fought against Soviet troops)," he said (News, 2021).

Saleh called on anti-Taliban citizens to join the resistance movement, which, "unlike the West, has not lost the desire to fight."

A letter was published in The Washington Post by the son of Ahmad Shah Masood, the commander-in-chief of the Afghan Civil War and commander of the Northern Alliance, in which he asked the West for help in protecting the Afghan people from the Taliban. Massoud said the mujahideen fighters are ready to fight and will fight, but will be defeated without the help of the West, and that would be tantamount to the eventual death of Afghans.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the main reasons of the US deployment in Afghanistan, comparative analysis of the 4 US Presidents (Bush, Obama, Trump, Biden) policy toward Afghanistan and reasons of the American withdrawal from this country.

Research Questions:

- 1) What happened after 9/11 events related to the US fighting against Taliban regime in Afghanistan?
- 2) What are the main strengths and weaknesses, of the policies of US four Presidents in Afghanistan?
- 3) What does the Taliban movement represent by itself?

With regards to the research Methods, the following methods have been used:

- 1) Quantitative research methods were used in the research paper, particularly determination the volume of US expenditure, number of troops etc. in Afghanistan.
- 2) Methods of comparative analysis – related to the analysis of the policies of 4 US presidents in Afghanistan.
- 3) content analysis - the study of, for example, the content of the researches of leading experts on US policy in Afghanistan.
- 4) Narrative analysis – related to the deep analysis of all those processes, which were and are going in Afghanistan related to the US policy in this country.

As for the **methodological framework** of the paper, the concept of the political realism is used, in the framework of which there are analyzed US policy in Afghanistan based on the geopolitical interests and national security strategy of Official Washington.

With regards of the findings of the paper – it is detailedly analyzed the different version related to the US policy in Afghanistan within the period 2001-2021.

Who are the Taliban?

In 1979, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. The coming to power of Hafizullah Amin gave the USSR a lot of thought - they were worried about the fact that Amin was trying to establish ties with China and Pakistan, as well as meeting with the US interim representative. Shortly after the invasion, Amin was killed and the government temporarily handed over Babrak Karmal, who had been brought from Moscow (Australian Refugee Review, 2021).

The move was described by US President Jimmy Carter as "the greatest threat to peace since World War II." Negotiations on Afghanistan have been going on in Geneva for a short time. After Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, the USSR changed its attitude towards Afghanistan. An agreement was reached in Geneva in 1988 - the Soviet Union began withdrawing from Afghanistan.

1989-1992 was quite chaotic in Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of the USSR, unrest broke out, a civil war broke out, which ended in 1992 with the capture of Kabul by the Mujahideen. This unrest gave rise to the Taliban and strengthened the violent group.

The Taliban movement, or "students," was formed in northern Pakistan in the 1990s. It was a Pashtun religious-fundamentalist movement that originally received funding from Saudi Arabia. Their goal was to restore Islamic norms and "restore peace" in Afghanistan. The organization also received great support from Pakistan.

In 1995, their power from southwestern Afghanistan was slowly increasing throughout the country. They occupied Herat province in 1995 and Kabul in 1996. Ultimately, by 1998, the Taliban controlled 90% of Afghanistan (CIA World Factbook, 2017).

The Taliban have banned television, music, and movies. Girls were restricted from attending school and deprived of their fundamental right to education. At the time, the Taliban was recognized internationally by only three countries: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the

United Arab Emirates. While in power, they are responsible for several serious crimes, including numerous murders and bombings.

From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban ruled the country under Sharia law. Sharia is a kind of code of conduct in the Islamic system, which is derived from the Qur'an and is considered an "eternal and irreplaceable" divine decree by some Muslims. Sharia law is very strict and difficult to reconcile with human rights - it provides for amputation of hands for theft, stoning, extortion, etc.

During the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, women were treated particularly harshly: they could not go out on their balconies, it is superfluous to talk about work and school. They had to wear a burqa - a garment that covers the whole body. If they wanted to leave the house, there must have been a man by their side. It was forbidden to wear high heels, to take photos.

Women were killed for making choices. For example, a girl who ran away from a wedding because she did not want to get married was found tortured and dead the next day. In Afghanistan during the Taliban, a woman was not allowed to have sex with a boy over the age of 12 if he was not a member of her family. Make-up, parties, dancing, singing, etc. were forbidden.

The Taliban uses extremely extreme Sharia methods to "restore justice" to the population - including cutting off the fingers already mentioned, slashing them, and stoning them.

In the area controlled by them, the "court" is like a public hearing - the offender is "acquitted" by several commanders without any formal advocacy. People who have no judicial experience and expertise make judgments not based on law, fundamental human rights, but based on Sharia law. Execution also takes place by them.

Not surprisingly, these methods have much greater legitimacy in the population than in the Central Government Court of Afghanistan.

The Taliban aim to create an Islamic state based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Sharia. It

retains its strength with several specific components. The first is local legitimacy - they managed to convince people that governing the country with Islamic Sharia would create an orderly state. In addition, they receive great assistance from Pakistan, both militarily and financially. Drugs are also important - 90% of the world's heroin reserves come from Afghanistan, which provides the Taliban with additional resources.

In 2001, US-led coalition forces attacked the Taliban, and in December of that year, the regime was defeated. However, after the US shifted its focus to Iraq, the violent group managed to gain strength and take control of many areas.

While the group now denies similarities to the Taliban that once ruled the country, everything is clear from their actions a few days after entering Kabul.

Why Were American Troops in Afghanistan - an Attack on the U.S. or an Attack on Democracy?

On September 11, 2001, a terrorist attack was carried out in the United States - it was coordinated by al-Qaeda. 19 Islamists hijacked 4 commercial passenger planes. 2 planes crashed into two skyscrapers of the World Trade Center, 1 - the Pentagon, and 1 crashed in the field of Somerset County (Pennsylvania). All four passengers on all four planes and most of the people inside the buildings were killed (Chitadze, 2011).

At the opening ceremony of West Point in 2002, US President George W. Bush delivered a historic speech that later became the basis for the "Bush Doctrine." He said the doctrine of restraint could not be a valid strategy against terrorist organizations and even announced the search for "new solutions to new problems" (News, 2021).

"For most of the last century, America's defense has been based on the doctrines of the Cold War. In some cases, these strategies are still in place. However, new threats require appropriate responses. "Unbalanced dictators with weapons of destruction can

use those weapons or hand them over to terrorist allies," Bush said in a statement.

Addressing Congress, Bush made several conditions for the Taliban: to hand over all al Qaeda leaders to the United States, to release illegally detained American citizens, to protect foreign diplomats and journalists, to close all terrorist training camps in their territory, and to hand over all terrorists to relevant agencies.

These demands are not for open negotiation or discussion. The Taliban must act and act immediately. They will hand over terrorists or share their fate. [...] Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it will not end here. It will not end until all "a terrorist group will not be found and defeated," said George W. Bush.

The "Bush Doctrine" became the defining factor of American foreign policy - the United States had to regain its leading position in the world, restore the use of force for preventive purposes, and continue the policy of spreading democracy in the Middle East.

In particular, the principle of the "Bush Doctrine" was that the United States had the right to take an aggressive approach to countries that were a haven for terrorists or to provide some kind of assistance to extremist groups. This doctrine soon embraced the policy of "preventive warfare" - the United States undertook to overthrow regimes that posed, to some extent, a potential threat to its security (News, 2021).

These ideological considerations formed the basis of the United States National Security Strategy, published on September 20, 2002, in which the threats posed by terrorist groups were taken much more seriously.

Shortly after 9/11, US and NATO forces launched a military offensive against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Although the United States and its allies overthrew the Taliban regime during Operation Unrestricted Freedom in 2001, they ultimately failed to defeat them - major forces camped in the mountains of

Waziristan and switched to guerrilla warfare tactics in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Bin Laden fled to Pakistan.

What was Happening in Afghanistan after 9/11

In 2001, along with the United States, British troops entered Afghanistan - Prime Minister Tony Blair announced the launch of a military operation in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan.

Taliban leaders have been moving to and from Kabul since 2001, prompting Western success - with coalition forces taking over the Taliban's main stronghold, Kandahar, in December.

After the overthrow of the Taliban, a modern Republic of Afghanistan was established in the country: the constitution was adopted in 2004, and presidential elections were held in which Hamid Karzai won.

In 2003, Bush announced that the war on terror was continuing - the United States had entered Iraq.

The Western coalition in Afghanistan had insufficient forces. As American attention shifted more to Iraq, Taliban fighters were slowly retreating and retaking territory. In 2003, Bush declared "the end of the main battle" in Afghanistan, leaving only 8,000 troops there.

Since 2006, the Taliban has begun to strengthen. In June 2006, 29-year-old Jim Phillipson, a British soldier, was killed during a two-way battle with the Taliban in Helmand province, prompting Britain to become more active in operations.

The Taliban was still growing stronger. If in 2005 the number of crimes committed by their suicidal terrorists was 27, in 2006 the number increased to 139. In 2007, US and NATO forces killed Taliban commander Mullah Abdullah (News, 2021).

Obama's Policy in Afghanistan

Shortly after taking office in the Oval Office, Barack Obama changed his strategy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan. He dismissed Bush's "win at all costs" approach.

"I, as President, refuse to set goals that go beyond our responsibilities and interests. I must address all the challenges that the United States has at the moment," Obama said (News, 2021).

This indicated that a war for which it was not his responsibility to start would be pushed to the limits and might have come to an end.

In his speech, Obama wanted to share responsibility with his Afghan government.

"We need to strengthen the capabilities of the Afghan security forces and the government so that they can take responsibility for the future of Afghanistan," the president said.

Still, the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan for the 2012 election harmed Obama's political career - he increased the contingent by 30,000 troops in 2009 and said he would eventually withdraw troops by 2011. International policy experts say Obama has followed the example of Iraq: Increasing the contingent in 2006 has brought some success. Politician Rory Stewart called the decision "Mephistopheles' burden" - the president bought power on the ground but lost time.

Indeed, this strategy did not work, but later, during an operation in Pakistan in 2011, al-Qaeda leader and mastermind of the 9/11 terrorist attack, Osama bin Laden, was ousted.

In 2009, Obama announced he would stay in Afghanistan until 2017 due to an "unsafe security situation." In 2014, the United States and Britain announced the end of combat operations in Afghanistan. Obama even said that the American war in Afghanistan was over and the country he ruled was now much safer than it was 13 years ago. He knew that the vast majority of Americans had lost patience - according to a 2014 ABC News poll, only 38% of the population thought the war in Afghanistan was worth it.

The words spoken by Obama remained an illusion. American troops remained in Afghanistan and usually fought.

In 2015, Obama announced that he would temporarily suspend troop withdrawals at the request of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. It was soon finally announced that 9800 troops would remain by the end of 2016.

Trump Strategy in Afghanistan

Trump's decision to leave Afghanistan should have depended not on specific deadlines, but the situation on the ground. This is how the 45th President of the United States asked the question. That was his first major change. "America's enemies will never know our plans," he said (News, 2021).

At the same time, Trump had increased India's role in the negotiation process. He said he would use all the resources at his disposal in Afghanistan: diplomacy, economy, military to get the desired result. This approach created an environment for negotiations and made the US more of a facilitator.

Trump's third and most important change was the issue of Pakistan. The president said America could no longer remain silent on the precedent set by Pakistan for creating a haven for terrorists. Although the Obama administration had already mentioned Pakistan, Trump had been thinking more seriously about strategic cooperation with India in the region, which is why he chose to take quite confrontational steps with Pakistan. These decisions could spark major geopolitical shifts in the region - with Trump's tough stance, Pakistan could shift to Russia and China.

In August 2017, Trump trusted his military advisers and deployed an additional 4,000 troops to Afghanistan. Trump's strategy to end the war seemed quite ineffective. The Taliban still retained control of parts of the country, and daily combat operations claimed many lives. Moreover, there were reports that Taliban control over rural areas was increasing.

It is safe to say that America is already "tired" of the war in Afghanistan. Former United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said that "every country that supports peace in Afghanistan must take steps to stop the Taliban's violent campaign" - it is difficult not to utter a word of despair. It would not be difficult for the Taliban either.

Trump has instructed Zalmay Khalilzad, the former US ambassador to Afghanistan, to reach an agreement with the Taliban to force NATO and the United States to leave the country.

The agreement was reached in February 2020. The then-Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, also attended the talks. US and NATO troops were due to leave Afghanistan in 14 months.

As Trump said, it was a "long and difficult journey" for America, but it was time to take care of the return of American soldiers home. Under the agreement, the U.S. was to reduce its presence in Afghanistan for the first 135 days and bring it to 8,600 people. This would have a positive impact on Trump's presidential campaign as well. In addition, the agreement included a clause in the exchange of 5,000 Taliban prisoners and 1,000 Afghan security forces prisoners (News, 2021).

The Taliban has refused to involve the Afghan government in the talks. They also referred to government officials as "American dolls." Eventually, the deal seemed pretty close after nine rounds in Doha, though Trump declared it "dead" when the Taliban killed an American soldier. Nevertheless, within two weeks negotiations resumed behind closed doors.

The agreement stipulated that al-Qaeda and other extremist groups should not be allowed to operate in the territory under their control. The legitimate government of Afghanistan and President Ghani did not take part in the US-Taliban talks. Many in Afghanistan neither hoped for this agreement, nor expected the Taliban to fulfill their commitments honestly. Conversely, some Afghan citizens have

linked Ghani's absence directly to the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the agreement.

Biden's Decision

"We cannot continue to increase our military presence in Afghanistan in the hope that the ideal conditions for our exit will ever be created," Joe Biden said in announcing his decision to leave Afghanistan a few months ago (The White House, 2021).

Indeed, the situation would never have been ideal, especially in the face of the Taliban's rising power, although many international relations experts believe that leaving Afghanistan at such a time and in such a form is a great geopolitical mistake.

Moreover, many also recalled the words of former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, according to whom Biden made a mistake in making all foreign policy decisions in the last 4 decades.

The president explained a few months ago that America is concentrating on the more important challenges it faces, such as cybersecurity and the growing threats coming from China.

Withdrawal of troops was to be completed by September 11, 2021, exactly 20 years after 9/11 - the 11th of September, when America changed its foreign policy and launched the "World War on Terror" (News, 2021).

However, the Taliban occupied the country much earlier than expected. Despite 20 years of US efforts, the Taliban took control of Kabul in a few months and took control of Afghanistan. Capturing 26 of the country's 34 provinces in 10 days and capturing the capital in 10 days was not a simple military task.

Logically, President Biden did not expect Kabul to fall so soon. This is confirmed by his statements. "Events unfolded faster than we expected," he says (White House, 2021).

This is also evidenced by the fact that soon after the withdrawal of the unit, thousands of soldiers were sent back again, for the evacuation of civilians.

The same is true of former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the US Deputy National Security Adviser. A similar speed was unexpected for the Central Intelligence Agency. "We saw that Afghan forces could not defend the country and everything happened faster than we expected," Pompeo said (News, 2021).

The President of the United States, despite the developments, does not regret the decision to withdraw troops. "It is wrong to instruct American troops to fight when Afghan security forces are not doing it. How many more generations should we send to the Afghan civil war? I will not repeat the mistakes of the past," he said (News, 2021).

Biden's decision has been hailed by US security experts and a majority of the political elite, regardless of party affiliation. Mitch McConnell, the leader of the Republican minority in the Senate, called the events in Afghanistan a "catastrophe" and described Biden's decision as a "disgraceful stain" on America's reputation.

Biden's decision was also criticized by Republican Sen. Ben Sasse - who also suggested that Afghanistan would once again become a haven for terrorists.

"No one should pretend to be surprised when the Taliban wins because we have left our Afghan friends; no one should say they are surprised when women and girls are abused again; no one should say they are surprised when the Taliban become a haven for terrorists again." Said Sasse.

George W. Bush, who decided to enter Afghanistan in 2001, called the events there "tragic" and said it was "deeply saddening"(News, 2021).

Maybe not Biden, but many thought in advance that something like this was inevitable. Moreover, during the months when the United States was slowly leaving the country, the visa requirements of the citizens increased significantly, to which the administration responded as follows:

"The evacuation will give rise to legal problems in the United States, so we expect a third host country to appear in the region. Most of the

translators applying for visas are residents of Kabul, and Kabul will not fall for at least six months."

Biden's decision to leave unconditionally has led to despair and resentment among the military, who have fought on behalf of the United States on Afghan soil for years.

"It turns out that I lost my leg there, it turns out that my friends died for no reason ?!", - writes the former military, Jack Cummings (News, 2021).

What Cost the War in Afghanistan?

According to Brown University estimates, the United States has spent \$ 2.26 trillion on Afghanistan since 2001. Specifically, \$ 88.3 billion has been spent on armaments and equipment for the Afghan army since March 2002. In addition to the military component, the United States has invested \$ 114 billion in the development of Afghanistan's private and non-governmental sectors (Brown University, 2021).

In addition to American troops, NATO-allied troops were present in the country, including a contingent from Georgia. It is true that the Alliance completed its official combat mission in 2014, but still maintained a 13,000-strong unit. In total, NATO delivered \$ 72 million worth of equipment to Afghanistan.

Most of this aid is said to have been squandered by corruption and misused. The 2020 report of the US Congress reads that about \$ 19 billion was misused in 2009-2019 - "lost".

As for the manpower, more than 3,500 coalition soldiers have been killed here since 2001, including more than 2,300 Americans and 450 Britons. 20660 were injured. In addition, according to a 2019 statement by President Ghani, Afghan security forces have lost more than 45,000 troops in hostilities (Brown Institute, 2021).

The UN mission, UNAMA, estimates that the war has claimed the lives of 110,000 civilians since 2009.

"How could he have behaved, would he not have stayed at all?!"

"They have a watch, we have time," said one of the Taliban generals. According to one of the military with POLITICO, the Taliban knew the weakness of the United States, which is the desire of the political class to gain victory quickly (News, 2021).

Biden's decision can be evaluated from many different perspectives. We can only evaluate this action as successful/unsuccessful if we look at the purpose from the very beginning - that is, why America invaded Afghanistan in 2001.

As security experts told the BBC, since the coalition forces are in Afghanistan, no international terrorist attacks have been carried out from that area - while in 1996-2001 al-Qaeda was able to set up large-scale terrorist camps, recruit and carry out attacks in the country. This achievement may be considered successful. Indeed, al-Qaeda has not been destroyed and part of it is still present in Afghanistan, albeit much weaker. If the mission's sole purpose was to fight al-Qaeda, it could not be considered a complete failure, but it is unclear why the United States did not leave Afghanistan when bin Laden was killed.

According to a study by Action on Armed Violence, more people were killed by explosive devices in Afghanistan in 2020 than in any other country (News, 2021). Despite 20 years of efforts, the war here has never stopped, peace has not been established. That is, America would not have achieved that goal if it had existed.

Al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda, and other terrorist groups may have been lost and weakened from time to time, although experts estimate that liberating Afghanistan from Western forces would be "encouraging" for them.

The country has not been successful in building a state, establishing good governance, establishing democracy, and ensuring the protection of human rights and other fundamental values.

Against the background of these obvious and less obvious consequences, we hear from several experts that the United States could do nothing more and could not stay there forever - especially when the Afghan government itself did not show much enthusiasm for the fight.

This is also true. The costs of the war in Afghanistan were financed from the pockets of an American taxpayer who might prefer to spend that money on social and economic services rather than the war on another continent.

However, some experts believe that in pragmatic terms, Biden acted wrongly when he left the country without guarantees of fulfilling the peace agreement. The most optimal solution on his part would be to demand the observance of the Doha Treaty and not leave the country until then.

An unconditional exit has been assessed by many experts as a 20-year-old drowning.

In the last 6 years, America has had less than 10,000 troops in the country, about the same number as other coalition troops. They helped Afghan troops to the point where the status quo was maintained in the country, the United States had almost no casualties, Afghans were replaced in ground combat operations, and the U.S. focused mainly on air support, training, and logistics. The U.S. maintained the situation with minimal losses in a way that did not create a power vacuum.

Some experts believe that the United States could maintain a contingent of several thousand troops, and the fall of the status quo - Kabul at the cost of minimal casualties, especially in this form, would adversely affect the image of America's "trusted partner" and the balance of power. In addition, some believe that the solution would be to reach a "power-sharing" agreement and leave the country that way.

This is not and cannot be the fault of America alone. It would not make sense to stay if the Afghan military itself did not want change.

The success of the Taliban has not come as a surprise to many experts. At the forefront of all this, they are using the capture of Kunduz, a province in northern Afghanistan, in 2015 - just as it turned out that the Taliban had large military capital. In addition, there are reports from this period that Afghan security forces were selling their weapons, refusing to fight, and entering into specific deals with the violent group.

While America has spent a lot of resources over the years, the Afghan government has focused more on gaining power and money than on improving military and social conditions.

According to experts, the Afghan government has convinced itself that America would never leave - this was another additional problem that led to their demoralization and soon surrenders. The Afghan government had hoped that the weakness of their troops would not allow Biden to decide to leave - which is why he did nothing to modernize the ANDSF.

What Fate Awaits Afghanistan

Since the Taliban have taken over the provinces and important cities of the country one after another, it is not at all surprising that panic has arisen among the population. As the Taliban approached Kabul, lots of people flocked to the airports. Among them were both foreigners and Afghan nationals themselves, who see the return of the Taliban as the end of the country. No one believes the Taliban claim that they have "changed" and are no longer using the old methods.

All of this has specific reasons - the forms of government and the form of society that the Taliban created in Afghanistan in 1996-2001.

The interview of one of the Taliban spokesmen, Suhail Shaheen, on the BBC after the occupation of Afghanistan was disturbing.

He said the Taliban was preparing for a "peaceful transfer of power" and was not seeking revenge on anyone.

The journalist asked him if the Taliban would again use violent punitive measures, to which Shaheen replied that it would "depend on the judges and the court" and that the judges would be appointed by the law of the next government. "Of course we want Islamic rule," he said (News, 2021).

According to Shahin, women in Afghanistan will be able to get a university education, they will also have the right to work. According to him, women will have the obligation not to wear a burqa, but a hijab.

It is also known that the Taliban has banned vaccination against coronavirus in one of the cities in the eastern province of Afghanistan. In addition to the politically difficult picture, it is likely that the country, which has fallen into the hands of the Taliban, will also face difficult social conditions.

As for international recognition, opinions here are divided. Some in the developed world are reluctant to provide financial support to the Taliban government, although some think that this aid could be used as a lever against the Taliban.

For example, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, did not rule out recognition if the Taliban agreed to specific "conditions", although, he said, the actions of the West in this regard should be coordinated.

What Does the Victory of the Taliban Mean for Al Qaeda?

U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said staying in Afghanistan for another, five or ten years was not in the U.S. state's interests. He categorically denied comparisons with 1975, when America was leaving Vietnam and said that, given its original goals, the US mission in Afghanistan was successful.

"Entering Afghanistan had one of the most important goals: to align with the people who attacked us on September 11. So we came here 20 years ago and during this time we have judged bin Laden, we have significantly reduced the threat posed by al Qaeda in Afghanistan to the US so that such an attack can take place. "We will simply not be able to get out of Afghanistan. We are going to have a place in the region to look at the possibility of a resurgence of the threat of terrorism and to be able to deal with it (Chitadze, 2020).

The statement raises an important question - why did the United States not leave Afghanistan in 2011 when Osama bin Laden was assassinated? Probably because there were no other, more significant threats to America, and also because, as Bush said in 2001, the fight was not just about al Qaeda.

Not so unfounded, the current developments have raised many expectations of al-Qaeda "returning" and strengthening its position in Afghanistan. The British Secretary of Defense, Ben Wallace, said that Afghanistan might again be a so-called "failed state" and strengthen al-Qaeda there. He was critical of the decision to withdraw and, given the threat of al-Qaeda's return, perceived the move as a mistake.

There is no doubt that the Taliban's "impressive" victory will be properly assessed by jihadists - including al-Qaeda. The reputation of strong states is often overshadowed by similar "defeats", especially against the background of a weak opponent. The United States already has a similar experience - Vietnam Syndrome. Perceptual reputation is of great importance in international relations, therefore, actors also make decisions against these considerations. The Taliban's takeover of the country in the shortest possible time in the eyes of jihadists is believed to significantly weaken the prestige of the United States and play a kind of incentive role in strengthening other terrorist organizations.

Beyond this theory, there is information released by the UN last month that al-Qaeda is based in at least 15 provinces in Afghanistan. Worldview ties between al Qaeda and the Taliban have been growing over the years. No one indeed knows exactly how they are in the relationship right now, however, the US security services call their relationship "close". Strengthening personal relationships between groups is also observed.

In addition to al-Qaeda, another extremist group, Hamas, seems very pleased. They congratulated the Taliban on their capture of Kabul and called the event "the culmination of the victory of the 20-year war."

Yet no one knows what the Taliban, which needs international legitimacy, will do.

The Role of the United States in International Relations after Afghanistan

In general, the definition of US foreign policy is based on a "grand strategy" that combines the means necessary to achieve national security.

Initially, Donald Trump's foreign strategy was based on the American championship and it aimed to restore leadership in the international system. Trump has been largely skeptical of international institutions, which is why he has left several agreements. His foreign policy soon became neo-isolationist, according to which the United States should not interfere in the ongoing processes in the Eastern Hemisphere and "take care of itself." The president withdrew troops from Syria and Afghanistan, launched trade wars with China, and the EU, and moved largely to strengthen domestic stability.

Indeed, Joe Biden's foreign policy is largely based on liberal internationalism, but experts say it is clear that the US is returning to the era of isolationism and its role and global influence are gradually diminishing during the last three administrations.

The superpower left alone on the world stage after the Cold War, America, in the 21st century, the so-called Challenger, China appeared. Its fast-growing economy has posed a major puzzle for the U.S. and its primacy is slowly being called into question. That is why it is natural that the US is spending its resources on "someone else's war" and is focusing more on the threats posed by China and Russia.

In any case, the inaction of one actor where there is a need for it creates a power vacuum. This is what happened in Iraq when Iran strengthened its position there after the withdrawal of the United States. Experts suggest that Iran, Russia, Pakistan, and China will now try to fill the vacuum created by the United States in Afghanistan.

The fact is that there are isolationist sentiments in the United States - as evidenced by its non-interference in the 2015 Syrian civil war. The emergence of a neo-isolationist nation will also affect its influence and the agenda of the spread of liberal democracy - the weakening of America is a great loss for the civilized world.

Conclusion

In general, it should be pointed out that the United States Armed Forces withdrawal from Afghanistan on 30 August 2021, marked the end of the 2001–2021 War in Afghanistan. The withdrawal took place in the context of the Doha Agreement (formally titled the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan), signed in February 2020 by the Trump administration and the Taliban without participation by the Afghan government, which provided for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan, in return for a Taliban pledge to prevent al-Qaeda from operating in areas under Taliban control, and future talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government for a permanent ceasefire (US State Department, 2020).

According to some media analysts, such as Alexander Nazaryan of *Yahoo! News*, the withdrawal was included among other actions that Biden broke with both Obama and Trump on, and was seen as maintaining the promise Biden made prior to becoming president that his term would not be "a third Obama term" because "President Trump has changed the landscape". Princeton professor Julian E. Zelizer claimed Biden "clearly learned a great deal from his time in the Obama presidency". *Washington Post* journalist Steven Levingston wrote, "Obama listened to military leaders who advised him that withdrawal would be a mistake. Biden, meanwhile, was the top administration official arguing for a much more limited role for American forces in Afghanistan. Later, Biden would go on to say that he could tell by Obama's 'body language' that he agreed with that assessment—even though he ultimately rejected it." Harvard historian James Kloppenberg stated, "only a fool would have been confident he knew all the answers [when it came to Afghanistan]. Obama was no fool" (Nazaryan, 2021).

The Diplomat reported on 17 April 2021, about the internal and external challenges for Afghanistan following the US troop withdrawal from the perspective of Afghanistan's civil society (Rity, 2021).

The Washington Post editorial board was critical of the withdrawal in an article dated 2 July 2021, saying the US was allowing its ally to fend for itself against the Taliban with insufficient resources, writing, "the descent from stalemate to defeat could be steep and grim. We wonder whether [Biden] has fully considered the consequences." (Washington Post, 2021).

David E. Sanger, a *New York Times* correspondent, analyzed the decision to leave Afghanistan by Joe Biden, and consequently the manner of the fall of Kabul, as the result of four basic assumptions, or miscalculations: that there was enough time before the Afghan government collapsed for the US to withdraw, that the Afghan forces had "the same drive" to win as the Taliban did, that there was "a

well-planned system for evacuating the embassy" and Afghans who had helped the US and their families, and that if the Taliban made it to Kabul, that there would be a "bloody block-by-block civil war" taking place in its streets (New York Times, 2021). A report from the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction released on 17 August found that the US had "struggled to develop and implement a coherent strategy" for the war and that "if the goal was

to rebuild and leave a country that could sustain itself and pose little threat to US national security interests, the overall picture is bleak". The report also found that the US prioritised internal political interests instead of Afghan interests, that it had demonstrated ignorance of local context, and had wasted billions of dollars on unsustainable and bureaucratic projects (The Daily Telegraph, 2021).

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